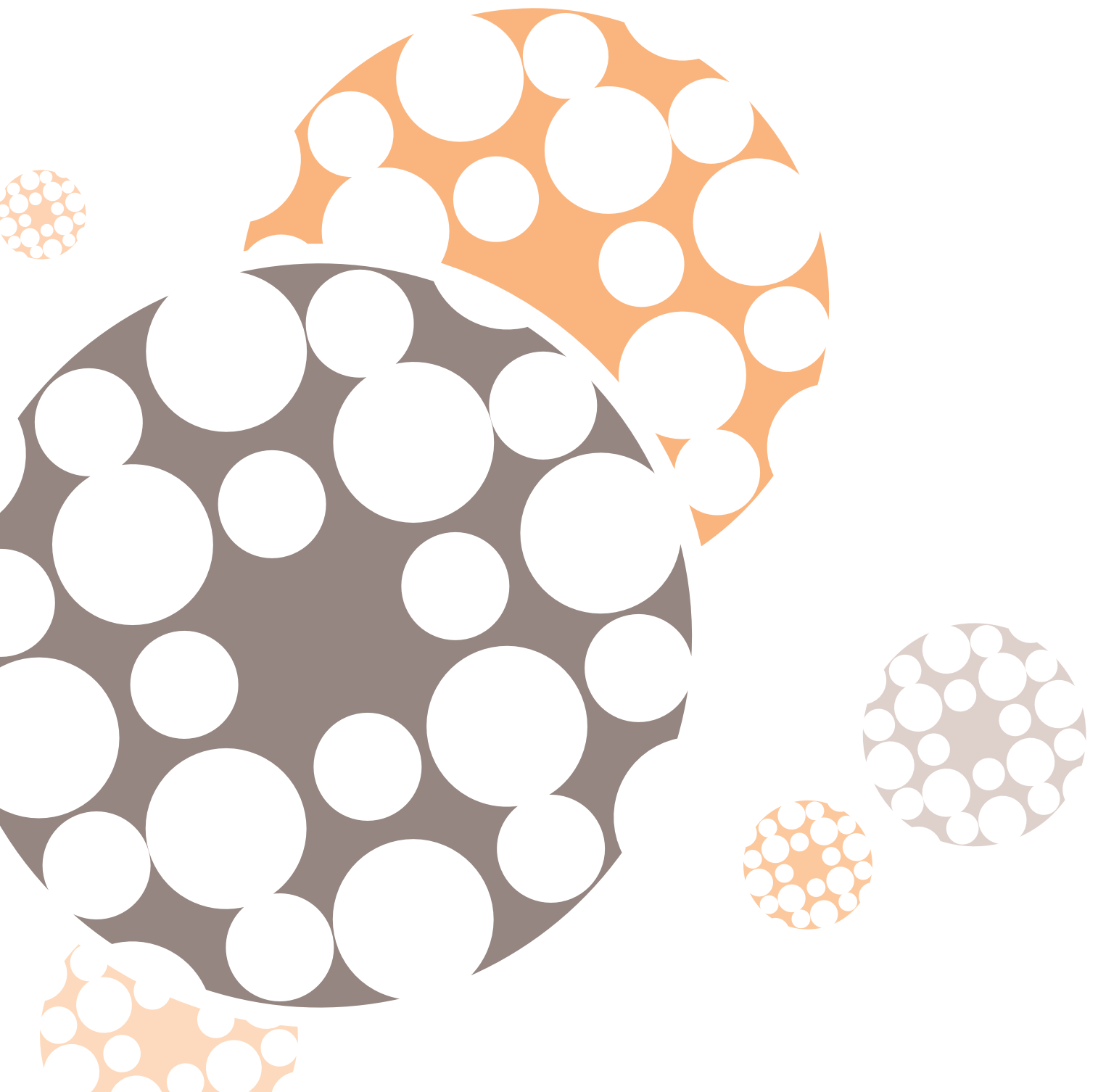


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What does network practice tell us about the impact of networking and collaboration?





What does network practice tell us about the impact of networking and collaboration?

Some key messages for network leaders and policy-makers from the Networked Learning Communities programme enquiry 2005.

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Edited by Karen Carter and Tricia Sharpe

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Introduction

The purpose of the enquiry

Over the past few years, interest has grown in networks as a means of enabling effective practice to be developed, tested and disseminated across organisations through collective action. But if collaboration is to become integral to the wider system, we need robust evidence about how to optimise the impact of networking.

Networks seem to offer a promising means of integrating central educational strategies with practice. Over the past few years the majority of schools in the UK have been incentivised by national policies to form school-to-school networks or collaboratives. These have included Leading Edge Partnerships, Primary National Strategy Learning Networks, Education Improvement Partnerships and school-to-school programmes such as Excellence in Cities, Federations, Specialist Schools and Networked Learning Communities. This approach is likely to expand as other services are linked to education in line with the *Every Child Matters* agenda.

This summary aims to help policy-makers and network leaders draw on current knowledge of what works in practice in school learning networks.

The enquiry focus and format

The Networked Learning Communities (NLC) programme enquiry (2005) was designed to focus on the impact of networking and collaboration. Ten networked learning communities were taken as the focus for case study research.

Primarily, this enquiry was undertaken to throw some light on the impact of networking and collaboration on pupils. Our aim was to look at examples of the impact of network practice upon pupil attainment, achievement and well-being. We wanted 'to go in through the eye of the pupil' and also relate their experiences to what was happening at school and network levels. A second focus was upon identifying the impact of networking and collaboration upon professional practice, leadership and the wider system.

The networks

Excellence through Collaboration and Enabling (EXCEL) NLC, Janus NLC, Kingsbridge NLC, Oldham NLC, Organic NLC, Primary Schools Learning Network (PSLN) NLC, Pendle Small Schools NLC, Penryn Partnership Plus NLC, Southampton NLC and Sevenoaks Talented and Gifted (STAG) NLC.

The full enquiry reports on these networks are available at www.ncsl.org.uk/nlc by clicking on 'Network Research'.

How to use this summary

Key features

Data analysis identified seven key features of the impact of networking and collaboration around which this enquiry summary is organised.

Key features

- 1 securing children's attainment
- 2 securing children's achievement
- 3 securing children's well-being
- 4 improving professional practice
- 5 growing leaders of the future
- 6 leading in and beyond the school
- 7 effecting impact at a system level

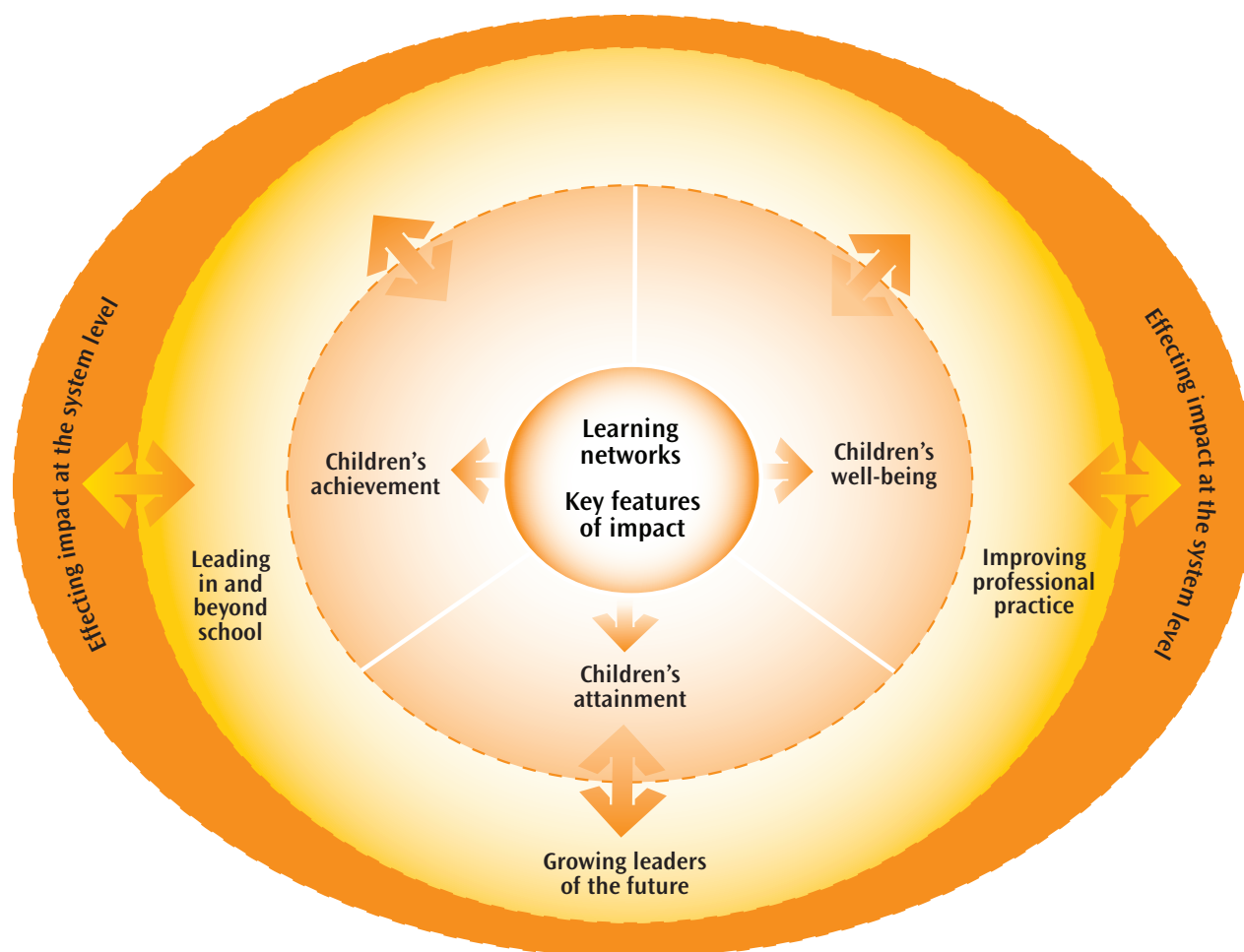
Using this summary

A preliminary literature review indicated some weaknesses and gaps in the existing knowledge base related to the impact of collaboration on pupil achievement, particularly at whole school level. As a result, this summary reports upon this dimension of impact as being at the heart of the NLC programme enquiry. The summary inevitably illuminates only a very small part of the complex set of activities and relationships in the networks studied, but it does offer some powerful lessons drawn from the practice of these case study networks.

The initial three sections of the summary expand the theme of children's attainment, achievement and well-being and present evidence of the difference networked learning has made. Each section draws some illustrations and quotations from the range of networks studied and includes a more detailed vignette drawn from the practice of one network. The vignettes describe a particular issue identified by the network and include representation of statistical data. Strategies adopted by the network in order to address the issue are also explored. Some contextual insights are provided to enhance understanding.

Subsequent sections of the summary are dedicated to each of the remaining key features of impact identified within the enquiry. Quotations and examples drawn from network practice illustrate these and highlight how successes have been achieved.

Learning networks: What are the key features of impact?



The model above has at its heart three elements of pupil success: **attainment, achievement and well-being**. This summary explores the ten networks' approaches to securing impact in these areas, more specifically:

- attainment – in mathematics, literacy and SATs scores at Key Stage 2
- achievement – pupils as self-aware independent learners, quality of pupil talk, use of ICT, pupil mentoring and improvements in attendance
- well-being – motivation and engagement, confidence and self-belief, and emotional literacy

Progress at pupil level is driven by development and change at school level. The prime influencers are **improvements in professional practice** and adjustments to, or transformation in, leadership practice. In considering the impact of networking and collaboration on professional practice, this summary explores three main themes:

- 1 sharing professional practice
- 2 enhancing skills and knowledge
- 3 changing attitudes and relationships

In addressing the issue of impact on leadership practice, two key features are explored: growing leaders of the future and leading in and beyond school. **Growing leaders of the future** shows the impact of networking and collaboration on establishing new opportunities for leadership development and the uptake of new sorts of leadership roles. **Leading in and beyond school** looks in particular at securing consistency of leadership practice and the benefits this can bring.

In considering impact at a system level some key lessons are extrapolated from the enquiry data. Included here are references to changing mindset, using the power of the network to help individual member schools in difficulty, and the effect at school and network levels of a shared focus and a harmonised approach to structures, objectives and practice.

Key feature 1: Securing children's attainment

What is the impact of networking and collaboration on attainment?

According to the schools involved in the enquiry, networking and collaboration make a significant contribution to rises in attainment. Similarly, network-wide statistics suggest that networked learning approaches improve examination results.

Messages from practice Mathematics



The Fischer Family Trust analysis, which examines contextual value added data at the pupil level, has shown that the performance of girls in Southampton NLC schools has improved for mathematics at Level 4+ over the last three years. Additionally, one primary school in the Organic NLC, in an area of significant deprivation, shows an increase of 53 per cent in the numbers of children achieving Level 4+ at Key Stage 2 (KS2) between 2002 and 2004, with an increase from 0 to 20 per cent of pupils achieving Level 5+.

Messages from practice Literacy



Organic NLC schools have shown increases in their KS2 English results since the network began. These increases are larger than the differences observed for the non-networked schools in Cheshire Local Authority. A similar pattern can be seen in the Penryn network – an area of rural deprivation – where improving pupils' narrative writing has been their focus. Attainment data for KS2 English is over and above the gains made by the non-networked schools in Cornwall. Results for the Pendle network at KS2 in English have consistently outperformed other schools in the local authority as well as the national averages since the network was formed in 2003. An illustration of this is in one primary school which shows a rise of 22 per cent in KS2 English Level 4+, moving from 71 per cent in 2000 to 93 per cent in 2004.

Messages from practice Average point scores



In three of the networks studied, KS2 average point scores have consistently improved in relation to other schools in the area. Southampton networked schools rose by 1.3 points, whereas the other schools in Southampton showed no increase between 2002 and 2004. In the Penryn network the results of networked schools rose by 1.8 points between 2001 and 2004, compared to 0.1 points in other Cornish schools. This improvement is also true for Pendle NLC where the average point score in networked schools improved 0.8 points, as compared to 0.2 for non-networked schools in Lancashire between 2002 and 2004.

How has this impact been achieved?

Closing the attainment gap at Key Stage 2 Janus NLC, Sefton, Merseyside

This vignette explores the relationship between raising attainment and the networked strategies used as leverage to address this issue.

What does the network look like?

The Janus network consists of 10 primary schools in Sefton, Merseyside. Five of the schools in highly deprived areas in the southern part of the local authority have a history of working together in a Catholic cluster and a beacon network. They joined with schools from the north of the local authority to form Janus in September 2002. The network has focused on two curriculum areas: improving literacy at KS2 using ICT, especially writing with boys, and Foundation Stage to KS1 transition. Threaded through these focuses are emotional intelligence and leadership development.

Network data

The graph shown in figure 1 uses KS2 attainment data to trace the influence of Janus NLC in closing the gap between the highest and lowest attaining schools in the network, at the same time as raising overall achievement at twice the national rate. Gaps between schools were calculated over four years in KS2 core subjects to see if these differences were decreasing from year-to-year, so 'closing the gap' between schools.

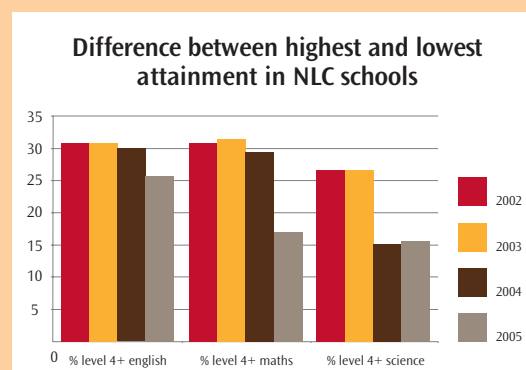


Figure 1 Janus Key Stage 2 attainment data by subject

The graph shows that for English, maths and science, the difference between the highest and lowest attaining schools in the network has decreased between 2002 and 2005¹. The same calculation was applied to the average point scores of schools within the network.

¹This analysis uses 2005 unamended, provisional data, as supplied by the DfES.

Key feature 1: Securing children's attainment

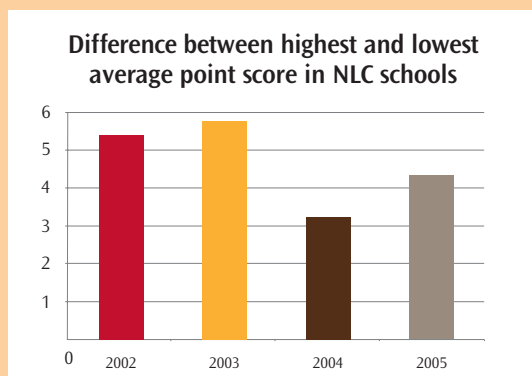


Figure 2 Janus Key Stage 2 attainment data by average points score

Figure 2 shows how the gap between the highest and lowest average point scores has closed between 2002 and 2005. At the same time, the bar has been raised across the network – the average point score for networked schools has increased by 0.4 points from 2002 to 2005, as compared to the national increase of 0.2 points.

The networked approach

Janus targeted the overwhelming proportion of its funding on adult learning, running whole staff training events for up to 80 staff at a time, focusing on Key Stages 1 and 2. The network took the decision to be self-sufficient, running CPD in-house, using networked learning models to combine theoretical input with practitioner-led training directly related to the context and challenges of the network's schools.

What made this model particularly powerful was that at the end of each session, practitioners were required to go away with a relevant task and return to the next session with evidence of its implementation in the classroom. Staff from the target year groups would share their learning with colleagues in their own schools before feeding back to the network as a whole. This also meant that each training session effectively became part of a larger enquiry process, building on feedback loops from previous sessions and allowing CPD to follow the track of actual classroom need. The planning happened at all levels, including support staff. This was the first time that teaching assistants had been involved in INSET training so systematically.

The notion of networked enquiry proved highly attractive to Janus schools and led to 14 practitioners undertaking Best Practice Research Scholarships (BPRS) in 2003–2004, with the support of a local university. Research projects included exploring the benefits of digital video for literacy in Year 5; emotional literacy; and implementing the PEWIT model of effective learning (incorporating problem-solving, embeddedness, working memory, interaction and time) in geography and art in Year 1.

As a consequence, network members have visited schools outside the network to share their findings and experiences, and teachers from outside the network have visited classes, both formally and informally. This indicates the degree of professional and intellectual confidence teachers have gained from the network's emphasis on collaborative enquiry.

Key feature 2: Securing children's achievement

What is the impact of networking and collaboration on achievement?

A preliminary literature review (Hadfield et al, 2006)² found evidence that changes in students' behaviour require more positive attitudes towards school and learning, and increased aspirations. Enquiry data suggest that the most effective approaches to raising achievement are those integrated with learning strategies.

Messages from practice Developing independent learners

Children and young people have become more aware and more knowledgeable about being independent learners. They are better able to reflect on, organise and evaluate their own learning, acquiring improved skills in organising their own work. Pupils from Years 2–7 in two PSLN primary schools confidently articulate how their teachers' focus on self-evaluation skills and partnering strategies helps them. The pupils share their ideas in pairs, check each other's work and comment on whether the lesson's learning objective has been met. They gradually build an awareness of precisely what it is they are trying to learn and how far they have got in achieving it.

"We had to think about a poem we'd like and all the stanzas and the structure of it. Then we had to make up the rules of what the poem should be. Then somebody else had to write the poem from your rules...the person who gave the rules had to read it and mark it and give it TA which means target achieved if they'd followed all the rules." (Year 4 pupil)

Messages from practice Improving the quality of pupil talk

In many networks teachers comment on the differences they see in their pupils. The focus on legitimating and improving the quality of pupil talk as a means of awakening and harnessing pupils' awareness of their potential as learners runs through many of the network accounts. In the Southampton Leading for Learning network there is a powerful consensus that being able to talk about their learning and employ a variety of techniques to problem-solve means that children are becoming more independent learners. They show an understanding about their learning that they are able to articulate, even at the Foundation Stage. Oldham NLC's use of the Philosophy for Children approach is another example:

"Pupils' speaking and listening ability has improved, as has some children's confidence in speaking out. Their ability to form 'philosophical questions' and to identify good questions for discussion has improved." (Year 3 teacher)

Messages from practice Pupil self-assessment and mentoring

The Penryn Partnership and the Janus network demonstrate the power of ICT in the development of pupils' self-assessment techniques. Penryn devised pupil-friendly versions of the assessment statements for writing used by teachers. This enabled pupils to understand their progress and make decisions themselves about their next steps in learning. Four de-motivated Year 5 boys in a Janus school have produced significantly improved writing as a result of taking part in a project focusing on writing for film using digital video:

"I think about what it would look like on the screen and that helps me get a picture in my head... Then I can write about it better." (Year 5 pupil)

Also in the Penryn network, pupils are supporting and encouraging each other through older pupils mentoring and teaching those who are lower attaining:

"I find out what's wrong in that lesson, if someone's just loud or they don't like that teacher so they misbehave. We find out and we set a little target on Post-it notes™. And we get them to write down what they think they do wrong and how they can improve it. Then I help them improve when we meet every Thursday." (Year 10 pupil)

How has this impact been achieved?

Improving attendance in a network school Kingsbridge NLC, Wigan

This vignette explores the strategies used in one NLC school to improve one element key to raising achievement: attendance.

What does the network look like?

Kingsbridge NLC and Excellence Cluster (an extension of Excellence in Cities) came together in 2002. It consists of five secondary schools and 10 primary schools in Wigan. They cater for approximately 8,000 pupils, 32 per cent of whom are entitled to free school meals and 3.3 per cent of whom have a special educational needs statement. The network's focus is to raise standards through measures such as raising pupil aspirations, removing barriers to learning and personalising the curriculum so it meets pupils' needs more effectively.

²Hadfield, M, Jopling, M, Noden, C, O'Leary, D & Stott, A, 2006, *What does the existing knowledge base tell us about the impact of networking and collaboration?*, Nottingham, National College for School Leadership.

Key feature 2: Securing children's achievement

Network data

Learning mentors have been employed across the Kingsbridge network and part of their brief is to improve attendance. Attendance figures at one network school (High School A) – located in an area which is among the 10 per cent most deprived in the country – have risen from 84 per cent in 2000 to 92 per cent in 2005. In addition, the percentage of students arriving at school late has decreased significantly in recent years. The most recent Ofsted inspection of the school in 2004 reports that, although still below the national average, *'attendance is much better'* and has *'improved very considerably'*.

The table and graph shown in figure 3 below show this improving picture of attendance:

Year	01–02	02–03	03–04	04–05
Authorised absences	10.7%	9.4%	9.7%	7.8%
Unauthorised absences	1.0%	0.6%	0.2%	0.2%
Late: before register close	4.1%	4.1%	1.6%	1.6%

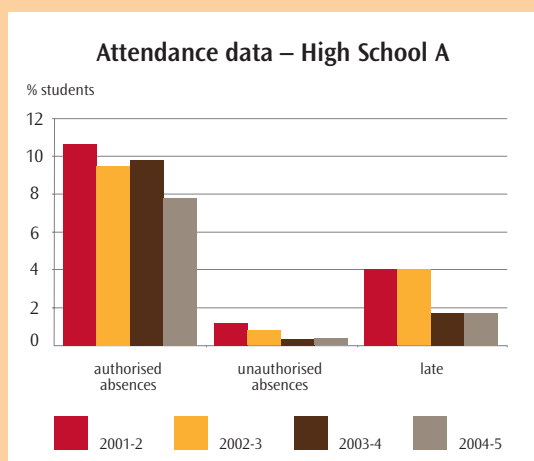


Figure 3 Kingsbridge attendance data – High School A

Highlighting the school's main strengths, the Ofsted report goes on to state that *'standards are improving rapidly'* and that the *'students' behaviour is good in response to the school's high expectations'*. Other improvements were also judged to have been made since the previous inspection, where *'leadership is of a higher quality'* and *'teaching is better'*, along with support for students with special educational needs.

During this same time period, the percentage of Year 11 students achieving 5 or more A* to C grades at GCSE rose from 7 per cent in 2000 to 35 per cent in 2004. Ofsted noted that although the school is well below the national average (54 per cent), these results are higher than in similar schools. In 2004 they were well above similar schools, with 100 per cent of the pupils achieving at least one GCSE/GNVQ.

The networked approach

Three network-related interventions have been described by the leadership of the network's schools, their staff and pupils as having provided emotional and social support and development for pupils and thus improved attendance, reduced disaffection and raised achievement. These interventions were the establishment of learning mentors; the creation in the primary sector of nurture rooms and in the secondary sector of the Rotunda base; and the adaptation of the curriculum to better meet the needs of the children.

Learning mentors are a good example of how expertise has been shared in the network. Monthly learning mentor meetings were designed for the network to share good practice and training in areas such as behaviour support and ICT. Learning mentors saw their responsibilities as vital in two areas: allowing the teaching staff to concentrate on teaching and learning and reducing the barriers which prevent pupils from accessing teaching and learning. Where there have been problems with attendance, punctuality or behaviour, mentors are the point of contact and both teachers and parents have referred pupils to them:

"If you have a problem there is always someone to help you. They will calm you down, they will give you ideas and they will help you to understand how what you have done affects others." (Network pupil)


Other key network activities which have built capacity and support across the network were the gifted and talented summer school initiative; headteacher meetings; middle management courses; graduate teaching and mentoring; the use of advanced skills teachers across schools; Key Stage working parties which looked at raising achievement in literacy and numeracy; and the behaviour improvement programme which trained all staff and provided equipment for personal, social and health education (PSHE).

Key feature 3: Securing children's well-being

What is the impact of networking and collaboration on well-being?

The enquiry identified two parallel, virtuous circles that are mutually reinforcing: improved attainment and achievement leading to greater motivation and sense of self-worth and its twin, a greater sense of self-worth leading to improved achievements. This key feature focuses on the well-being elements of the cycle, and the examples illustrate the dynamic connections with other features.

Messages from practice Self-awareness and motivation




The processes which encourage pupils to become more aware of themselves as learners motivate the children more and generate significantly greater engagement.

For example, there has been a strong impact on primary children in the EXCEL network as a result of their story-making project.

"The lad who is autistic in my class is only seven and he would never have been able to sustain the telling of a story, but because children are so strong visually he went through a phase of drawing the story-map. We then recorded him telling everybody the story and it's been so good for his self-esteem and confidence...he's now using drawings to communicate stories which he is making up." (SEN teacher)

'Similarly in Pendle, a Year 2 pupil who "prior to involvement with the project could write up to two sentences, is now able to undertake independent writing. Even when her teaching assistant is not present....she can compose stories on her own."

Messages from practice Self-perception and self-esteem




There is also clear evidence that changing the ways in which pupils perceive themselves and others, increases their self-esteem and belief in their own potential to succeed in school. Year 4 pupils at one Organic network primary school *"are more positive about their strengths. They speak to each other in a positive way and are more accepting of each other. They pay each other compliments."*

In the Southampton network the adults think the changes have been radical: *"I've noticed a dramatic change in them – just the way that they walk, their confidence, their behaviour, the way they speak to adults – it really has improved."*

The international networking experiences offered by the EXCEL network to students also brought real changes in the ways that the young people perceived themselves:

"Before we went we'd have been like horrible to people and that, but you just grow up and we get on with people now. Before we would just judge people before we actually spoke to them. But they (the Maltese) don't do that. They talk to you straight away." (Year 9 pupil)

Messages from practice Respect and equality




A Year 8 pupil research project in the STAG network shows how their approach to Gifted and Talented (G&T) has created more respect and equality between the children.

"Having a mixed-ability group worked very well. The boys were initially aware that there were some low and some high achievers but by the end there was clearly real equality – everybody listening to each other's ideas. It made them realise that everyone can have good ideas, whatever band they're in." (Network teacher)

A Year 10 pupil in the Penryn Partnership NLC summarised the ultimate effect:

"Learning because you want to, not because you have to."

Messages from practice Emotional literacy



Children have developed greater understanding of their own emotions and ways of dealing with emotions, particularly those that get in the way of learning. One of the major strategies used by network schools to extend self-knowledge and awareness is through the development of emotional literacy. This enables children to be more in control and to choose to make changes in their behaviour.

The Organic network has adapted the work of Eva Hoffman into their *Words Matter* project. The emphasis on building understanding of feelings and reactions has generated a culture in which children can 'get things off their chest' through, for example, circle time and breakfast clubs. One school has furnished a nurture room which all classes can use to explore ways of dealing with things that happen at home.

Key feature 3: Securing children's well-being

How has this impact been achieved?

Adding value Penryn Partnership Plus NLC, Cornwall

This vignette reveals the transformation that can be secured when pupil well-being becomes a serious focus of attention. In this network example, action was shaped by the decision to improve value added measures.

What does the network look like?

Penryn Partnership Plus (PPP) was formed during the 1990s as a cross-phase cluster of schools focusing on transition, and sharing opportunities and resources in physical education. The cluster consists of 10 schools in a largely rural area of mid-Cornwall: three schools which share the same campus (an infant, a junior and a secondary school) and seven feeder primary schools. After two to three years, focus on the curriculum came to the fore and on dovetailing school improvement plans. In 2003, the cluster became a networked learning community and began to develop a professional learning community in each school. PPP aims to continually develop children's aspirations and sense of self-esteem by offering a broader range of opportunities during the school day and beyond than would be possible for any single school to provide.

Network data

The Penryn Partnership Plus network has achieved improvements over time in terms of value added (VA) between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Analysis of 2003 data shown in figure 4 revealed that there were four schools within the network which achieved a value added measure of below 100.

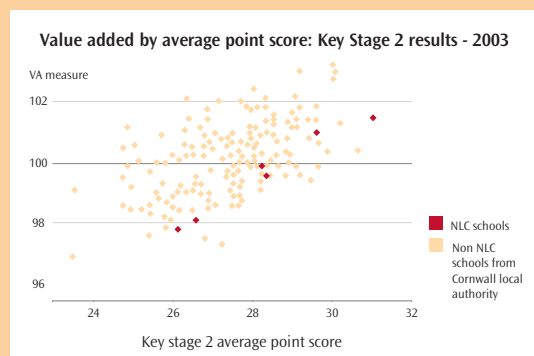


Figure 4 Value added by average point score 2003

Figure 5 shows that in 2004, these four schools displayed improvements in their value added measures, with the result that all the network schools achieved a value added score of at least 100.

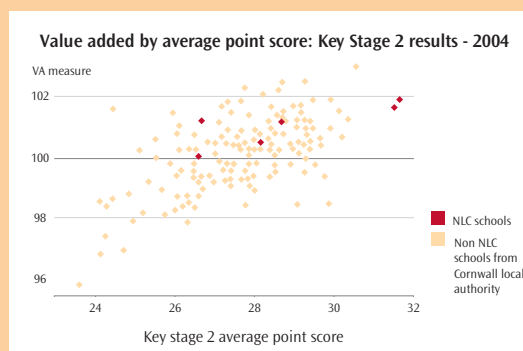


Figure 5 Value added by average point score 2004

The networked approach

Much work has been done to build communication and leadership skills through the development of co-operation, trust, self-motivation and confidence. Network schools have invested in the approaches advocated by the Global Institute for Student Aspirations (GISA), which provides a framework to raise standards by improving teaching and learning environments in partnership with teachers and parents. A questionnaire completed by all students every two years based on the eight GISA dimensions highlighted that for the students 'Belonging', 'Fun' and 'Excitement' were areas requiring attention. The network took up this challenge by offering opportunities such as the network production of *Joseph and His Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* involving 450 Year 5 and 6 pupils, and a partnership residential for 220 KS2 pupils.

The network has adopted a model of diversity within a common purpose. The focus on developing pupils' self-assessment skills has used student progress tracking systems. During 2002-3 a writing project involved 200 Year 6 pupils. This was expanded to 800 Year 3, 4, 5 and 6 pupils during 2003-4. For pupils, being able to plot their own progress and set their own targets increased their understanding and motivation as well as providing new opportunities for dialogue with adults.


Progress has been underpinned by systematic approaches to adult learning. One of the network's headteachers led two half-day sessions for all Year 6 teachers and teaching assistants on aspects such as instruction in how to use the ICT-based formative assessment tool. All of the ICT New Opportunities Fund training in the PPP schools was run by four network teachers. According to the network's co-leaders, this reflects the network's prioritising of 'home-grown, tailor-made' solutions which allow training to be matched to specific adult learning needs at the same time as offering a wealth of leadership opportunities to practitioners.

Key feature 4: Improving professional practice

What is the impact of networking and collaboration?

The enquiry provided extensive evidence of the critical relationship between improving pupil attainment, achievement and well-being and improving professional practice.


Messages from practice Sharing professional practice



The enquiry revealed numerous examples of the impact networked learning communities have on classroom practice. Often this has been fuelled by the skills and expertise of critical friends, sometimes drawn from university partners, or through the judicious selection and adaptation of externally-devised curriculum packages. The achievements of the PSLN network are firmly based in their use of advice and support from the University of Nottingham. This has helped to establish research triads and the use of Shirley Clarke's work on the self-evaluation aspects of assessment. Their exploration of partnering has been a key feature of the change in classroom practice.

"It was always the ones with the problems that you got to see so it means you can watch a lot more children during a lesson and assess what's going on." (Year 2 teacher)

Messages from practice Enhancing skills and knowledge




Teachers and learning support staff have not only expanded their portfolio of approaches but can clearly see how these developments can be transferred into other learning settings. Sharing a focus on improving literacy, the EXCEL network created a story-making project, which is perceived as bringing welcome variety into this aspect of the literacy hour:

"- it has come up with short five-minute activities on word, sentence and text structures, which tag back to your literacy strategy. There's a lot more oral drama-based activities which allow you to do your word text and sentence structure stuff so you don't lose the learning." (Reception teacher)

"The children learn a lot about the structures and patterns of writing a story from this project - if I was going to leave here and teach somewhere different, I would try to use these strategies and not go back to what I was doing." (Year 5 teacher)

Messages from practice Changing attitudes and relationships



Many of the networks studied show evidence of the way networked approaches have generated a different quality of relationships in classrooms. Instead of seeing children as recipients of knowledge, adults are beginning to see them as partners in learning. Adults are remembering that they too are learners, which leads them to change their view of themselves and the children they teach. Their practice changes as a result. The priority becomes cultivating a learning community in each classroom.

"I'm now much more critical of my own actions. I used to be anxious about one teacher observing me but I now realise I've got 30 observations going on all the time. It's made me much more aware - they actually know what's going on - the children are taking more control." (Network teacher)

How has this impact been achieved?

School enquiry groups – PSLN NLC Whole school involvement – Pendle NLC

PSLN's core purpose has always centred on **developing action-based enquiry** to raise standards in teaching and learning. Working through a collaborative system of school enquiry groups, each school decides its own particular area for investigation. One school, for example, focused on improving literacy standards through self-evaluation and paired work. From the pupils' perspectives, this change in classroom practice has had a direct impact on their self-confidence and therefore their attainment.


Pendle NLC's success is attributed to the involvement of all staff in network activity. One of the ways this has been achieved is by using the network itself as a primary resource for what one of the network's headteachers described as *"low cost, high impact CPD"*, in contrast to externally-run courses. It is clear that this emphasis on training has been valued by staff, not least because involvement is extended to staff members such as site supervisors and secretaries and because it allows staff from different schools to get together and share experiences. Benefits identified included opportunities to meet other professionals and be part of a big team; being able to talk informally; having the confidence to contact other schools for advice or resources; and feeling less isolated and insular.

Key feature 5: Growing leaders of the future

What is the impact of networking and collaboration?

Changes in practice happen because those in formal leadership roles are committed to working with the passion of teachers to make a difference. They use available financial and human resources to put in place ways in which their staff can talk to one another, share ideas and enquire together. They buy in outside expertise to support the kind of learning ideas described earlier in this summary, or generate homegrown approaches with the intention of increasing the confidence and ability of their staff.

Messages from practice New leadership roles and opportunities




EXCEL confirmed the importance of CPD to the growth of teachers' professional confidence and skills. At a school-wide level, membership appears to have provided powerful opportunities:

"Because of the NLC, 37-40 staff have taken on new aspects of leadership. Will that in the end make a difference to standards for pupils? Yes,... cumulatively with other initiatives." (Network headteacher)


Leaders begin to see through participation in these processes that leadership is not purely dependent on people in formal positions of authority. They start to recognise that individual teachers are leaders of learning and indeed that teaching assistants and pupils can take the lead in learning as well. In the social context of schools in challenging circumstances, for instance, this can lead to a revision of the curriculum in order to make sure it is relevant to the lives of their children outside school, particularly older, disaffected students.

Messages from practice Distributing leadership



Those in formal positions of authority realise that by sharing leadership tasks they share responsibility and burdens, which in turn gives them confidence. This kind of leadership infuses all meaningful discussion about networks. There is dawning understanding in some of these networks that leadership can be fostered at all levels, including that of teaching assistants.

Messages from practice Changes in staff recruitment practice



The headteacher of one Janus network school has changed the way she recruits new staff to better assess their potential:

"I would be delving deep to see what any candidates thought about learning and how it happens...we've had some fabulous discussions about how learners learn."

How has this impact been achieved?

Building capacity through distributed leadership – Oldham NLC

"We asked ourselves: how do we distribute decision-making? What opportunities do we give lead learners to lead? In that discussion there was a big moment – a realisation that we had in the past drawn upon external expertise but that within the network we had built internal capacity."

The adult co-coaching strand of network activity has given staff in all of the schools the skills to observe, reflect upon and discuss each other's classroom practice and has encouraged the development of school environments where teaching and learning are regularly debated. Classroom support staff have also been drawn into these conversations and benefited from the debate.

Additionally, the schools, and the network, have gained increased internal capacity in and from Philosophy for Children (P4C). The majority of teaching staff have received Level 1 P4C training, and key staff in each of the schools have been identified as 'lead learners' for philosophy and undertaken the more intensive four-day residential course to become trained to Level 2. These individuals have become key levers for change across their schools, and as their expertise has grown, so has their confidence to lead initiatives and shape their future direction:

"It's (control) moving both ways, down-up and up-down. There's still a place for headteacher involvement, but it's definitely moving both ways." (Network headteacher)

As the network evolved, all of the schools became involved in the leadership of the network. In the early days the agenda had very much been driven by one school. One of the network's headteachers suggested that a key moment for the network was when it first *"went beyond the head's office"*. As the network has reconfigured itself and the way in which it functions, space has been created for classroom teachers to be 'lead learners' in the network.


Key feature 6: Leading in and beyond the school

What is the impact of networking and collaboration?

The search for consistency of practice across all classrooms as opposed to the isolated excellent practice of individuals appears to be where the real impact of networking and collaboration on leadership is felt at school level.


"You'll see consistency in the classrooms – and that's a key word if you're a head. The learning policy – the implementation of that – is having the impact of seeing motivated children, creative – we're getting there and it's fantastic – the results, the attitudes, the calmness in the school." (Network headteacher)

Messages from practice Spreading innovation




One of the most common ways of spreading innovative practice into more classrooms has been through the use of teacher enquiry projects, particularly through cross-school collaborative pairs or triads. In PSLN, Southampton, EXCEL, Penryn and Janus NLCs there are detailed explorations of the impact on the ways in which teachers think, understand learning (their own as well as their pupils'), organise their classrooms and devise teaching materials.

Messages from practice New approaches to curriculum design



As schools work more closely together, the adults' learning generates different approaches to curriculum design and delivery. Sharing curriculum resources has led to significant changes in the ways that the schools in the Janus network are using ICT and multimedia to "*provoke children's and adults' learning*". *Chocolate Palace* – a multimedia resource for literacy created by children and overseen by a Year 3 teacher – has now become one of the many resources available through the network's website, encouraging a cross-curricular rather than subject-specific approach.

Messages from practice Drawing on international perspectives



In EXCEL NLC research results have been distilled into a series of useful papers which have been published by the International Learning and Research Centre, a key member of the network.

The network has a strong international flavour, with six associate member schools in Malta. This element of the network has provided a fresh perspective for all its work, as each of the network activities has used the international links to drive innovation in one way or another. Over the life of the network there have been numerous international learning exchange visits between pupils and teachers.

How has this impact been achieved?

Establishing ownership of change – PSLN NLC Achieving consistency across the board – EXCEL NLC

In PSLN Network's School Inquiry Group (SIG) co-ordinators in each network school ensure that each classroom teacher retains control and responsibility for planning and teaching in their own classroom. This was regarded as a vital ingredient in the network's success. Generating a sense of ownership of the initiative has proved critical to the success of the roll-out of the techniques. For example, once initial research showed that paired work had been particularly successful in the eyes of both children and teachers, a decision was made that pairings would be established across the whole school. However, it was introduced in such a way that gave some degree of flexibility and choice. One of the distinctive values of the network approach is the capacity to share successful practices with other schools in the network.

Achieving a level of consistency across all classrooms and schools has been taken a step further by the EXCEL network. Their story-making framework is now used in all of their primary schools. They systematically researched and developed it in one school, testing out many strategies in the classroom before starting to test it further in other schools in the network. One network school, for example, has managed to embed the story-making project to the extent that a number of teachers described it very much as a 'whole school' project. Over three years, school leaders have managed to engage all staff in the project. A number of strategies have been used to achieve this, ranging from informal one-to-one peer coaching through to formal training sessions. The network's headteachers see professional development as vital to maintaining momentum for ongoing and continuous school improvement. The cross-phase collaboration has enabled secondary practitioners to adapt the primary story-making project:

"One of the schools sends teachers in to help with MFL. Now they have picked up on our story-making project and have taken some of the stories back to translate them into French." (Network Teacher)

Key feature 7: Effecting an impact at system level

What is the impact of networking and collaboration?

A key indicator of impact at system level is increased capacity for change. Integral to this is a shift in attitude towards more rigour in questioning existing structures and practice.

Messages from practice Changing the mindset



A crucial element in those networks that use enquiry is the adoption of an 'enquiry mindset'. Here, enquiry is appreciated as something that infuses the work of the network, encouraging everyone to understand their own learning better. Debate about learning moves to centre-stage in the classroom and children in all classes begin to ask good questions that demonstrate their enquiring minds.

Those in leadership positions are actively seeking out and providing opportunities for staff to explore and share and change their practice through enquiring together. This is not the same as simply doing action research projects, or indeed encouraging individual teachers to do action research MAs. A discussion with the headteachers in the Oldham network revealed just how all-pervasive an enquiry-based approach has been – through their work in using Philosophy for Children.

"Staff think of the curriculum in a different way – a more active, enquiry-based curriculum where good questioning pervades the whole curriculum. We've had whole enquiry weeks where children across age groups have engaged in enquiry together. The whole school was involved."
(Network headteacher)

Messages from practice Supporting schools in difficulty



In some NLCs, supporting network members in difficulties was seen as a core value. For example, in Penryn NLC, one of the primary schools was categorised as having serious weaknesses. The network viewed the situation as one they all needed to address and provided as much advice and support as possible:

"She said that the partnership and the networked learning aspect of it has enabled her to make massive improvements. She said if it hadn't been for (this)... they wouldn't have come out of serious weaknesses so quickly." (Secondary liaison teacher reporting a conversation with a network primary headteacher)

How has this impact been achieved?

A single minded focus and network harmonisation – STAG NLC

According to the network's co-leaders and headteachers, one of the main differences of the STAG network has been to provide a more concerted impetus for schools to focus on the attainment of high-attaining pupils. The network-wide upward trends suggest that the network has had a positive effect. The other key focus has been a recognition that all pupils possess gifts and talents of some kind, and that these should be identified and encouraged.

In its first year STAG carried out extensive groundwork to raise the profile and status of policy and practice in relation to students identified as 'gifted and talented'. During this period, the network also spent time establishing the structures and processes to support the network's initial activities. The appointment of a dedicated Network Co-ordinator for three days a week at the end of STAG's first year was significant. Part of the early work of the co-ordinator was to undertake a gifted and talented audit across all schools, which highlighted good practice and identified areas for targeted improvement. The co-ordinator led a series of sessions for governors, school staff and parents designed to raise the profile of a more inclusive approach to gifted and talented students. Each school also has a gifted and talented co-ordinator. They meet regularly to develop policy and practice.

All of the network's schools have contributed to the formulation of the network's learning focus on increasing the achievement of high-attaining pupils, which has encouraged harmony between school and network objectives. While the extent to which individual network schools addressed the gifted and talented focus has varied, this does not appear to have directly affected participation in or the reported impact of activity. While one school reported that its work on gifted and talented was 'relatively embryonic', in all cases teachers and the network co-ordinator had had sufficient input to ensure that projects fitted current needs and priorities identified by each school. Cross-network activities have included master-classes, a summer school, puzzle days and the construction of 'talent walls' at each of the primary schools, and a focus on pupil research in the two secondary schools into issues at transition.

Conclusions

In this enquiry, networks have been shown to help school leaders, teachers and schools address problems they have struggled seriously with alone. This was found to be particularly the case in schools battling against the effects of multiple deprivation on their pupils, where it was reported that *“our passionate belief is our driving force and our source of energy”*. A passion for and commitment to, the benefits of networking and collaboration in practice are clearly reflected in the views of many of the network participants featured in this summary. As one network headteacher described: *“It’s a joy to be with people who’ve got the same passions!”*

In this study, school learning networks have been shown to connect up this passion and commitment with the resources, collaboration and expertise needed to generate more vibrant and effective learning communities. This enhances understanding of learning in its widest sense, and can dramatically alter the expectations of network participants including both adults and pupils, leading to qualitatively different relationships in schools and classrooms. At the centre of this process, children develop a better understanding of their own learning and potential as learners – with both real and potential impacts for children’s attainment, achievement and well-being.

In networks, the opportunities to share experience, expertise and thinking with other schools has been shown to give school leaders and other adults greater confidence to determine their direction. For many network participants this particular impact of networking and collaboration has been profound:

“The network has changed my perception of education. I have realised I am still a learner. It has changed me as a person – I am now more confident. The relationship between me and my job is good and I have tremendous professional confidence. I can justify what and why we do what we do. It is not that it is comfortable: it is a learning journey. Being in a network makes sure that you are never in a rut.”

As a result of collaborative working, networks have created a context for sharing professional practice with a clear focus on outcomes and benefits for children. Networking and collaboration has also been shown to create new opportunities for leadership and leadership learning in, across and beyond schools, in a way which did not exist previously.

Networking and collaboration fundamentally influences the way that participating schools think and operate. Network leaders, co-leaders, strategy or steering groups explicitly plan places, opportunities and activities that encourage and stimulate collaboration across schools. Teachers and other professionals in network schools share their practice and get feedback from their peers, building a community that supports and extends the individual’s contribution.

Networked structures and collaborative working practices are created. These include, amongst others: network research and enquiry groups; headteacher, co-ordinator or lead learner development groups; and working groups of teachers, teaching assistants and pupils. These work groups have been shown to provide a powerful means by which local, contextualised problem-solving can take place where there is an active commitment to work collaboratively – learning from, with and on behalf of each other and the wider system within a learning community.

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Networked Learning Communities

learning from each other learning with each other learning on behalf of each other